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The spirituality of unity

At a recent gathering of prominent Catholic leaders, Chiara Lubich was invited to speak about the spirituality animating the Focolare Movement. We are publishing here the first part of that conversation.

As we all know, a spirituality in the Church is simply a way of living Christianity. Cardinal Montini expressed this well in one of his speeches in 1960, "(A spirituality) is the manner in which we try to accomplish the ideal of Christian life;" and speaking of the spirituality of the Cure of Ars, he invited his audience to seek out "the underlying creative principles, the key ideas, the lines of development. . ."

This is what I too will try to do, even though — I confess — this task seems to be difficult for me. Why? For the very reason that a spirituality in the Church is a life, it is Life, it is Christianity, it is the Gospel, even though it is all viewed from a particular perspective.

It is difficult to explain in a few words the life that God, day by day, for more than thirty years, gradually wove together with the ideas or inspirations which he bestows, step-by-step, on the instruments he uses, thus giving back to the world, in an always new form suited to the times, the eternal truth of the Good News.

How is it possible to express in a few pages the infinite riches of a lifetime? I might give a deformed and absolutely inadequate idea of our spirituality.

However, having said this, I too will strive to mention some of the key ideas, some aspects of our life.

Our spirituality is the Gospel.

This conviction has always been strong in us, since the beginning of the Movement, but it was precisely this "translating the Gospel into life" that, after a few months, unleashed a small revolution in Trent - the evangelical revolution. It was a revolution in which Christ's mentality and way of life began to replace the ordinary way of living. The world around us was "scandalized" by this new life which gave birth to a vast community where isolated and scattered persons came together, where the spiritual and material communion of goods was practiced. Namely, a large group of Christians became a living portion of the Church for, as Tertullian says, "the Church is also there where three, though they are laymen, are united in the name of Christ.

We thought we were simply living the Gospel, the eternal Gospel, the Gospel of everyone, but it was then that unnoticed, God began underlining in our hearts certain words which were to become the key ideas of our spirituality. This was all at the beginning, but the Holy Spirit deepened our understanding of these ideas continually throughout the 34 years of the life of the Movement.

The first key idea upon which God built our spirituality was *God-Love.*

What a change this truth produced in our souls when, through a gift from God, we understood it in a completely new way! What a change it brings about today, too, in those who are able to grasp this reality a little bit. Our Christian life before this new understanding, even if it was good and based on solid faith, still was lived as if we were orphans. Later came the discovery, God is love; God is our Father.

Our hearts, which before had lived in the darkness of our earthly life - with this discovery - opened up and became one with the One who loves us, who thinks of everything, who counts the "hair on our head," (Mt. 10:30).

The joyful and sorrowful circumstances of life acquired a very new meaning: everything is foreseen by God! But not just this: everything is foreseen and willed or permitted by the love of God. No longer can anything frighten us.

We acquired a new way of reasoning based on the belief that God is behind everything which concerns us. We felt that we were the object of his love, that we were "taken up into God's hands," (Is. 49:16), we were certain that nothing happens without his consent.

St. Mary Major's Square in Trent after the bombings of May 13, 1944. On this background of death the first sparks of a new life based on the Gospel came into being. It was the beginning of the future Focolare Movement which today is present in more than 100 countries.

This faith fortifies you, it makes you exult, it leads you to tears when you first experience it. It is a gift from God that makes you cry out, "We have . . . believed in . . . love" (Jn. 4:16).

This faith was very strong in the first focolarine. Since they were always in danger of death because of the raging war, they used to say that if they were to die, they would have liked to be buried in a common grave with the inscription, "We have believed in love" instead of their names.

What a profound joy the Movement experienced when in 1968, Pope Paul VI, in his "Profession of Faith" said, "We believe in one God ... we believe that this God is absolutely one ... He is He who is, as he himself revealed to Moses, and he is love ... as the Apostle John teaches us: so that these two names Being and Love, ineffably express the same divine reality ..." (1)

It was this faith in God's love for us that inspired us to follow the words of the Gospel which showed us how to answer love with love. It was at this point that the following sentence became deeply rooted in our hearts, "Not he who says 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father ..." (Mt. 7:21). To love then, meant to do the will of God.

We understood that the will of God could not be done "resigning" ourselves to it as it is often intended.

To do the will of God was the greatest divine adventure to which a person can be called. This adventure was not to follow our own limited, confined will, nor to accomplish our own small projects, but rather, to abandon ourselves to God and to accomplish that plan which he has for each one, a plan which is divine and vast, far beyond our imagination.

If a first creative principle underlying our spirituality can be said to be God-love, a second key idea is the will of God.

It would be enough to do his will to be perfect Christians. In fact, God, through Isaiah, says that the church will be given a new name "My will in her." (Is. 62:14). Francis de Sales states, " ... it is as if (God) is saying that the non-Christians each have in their hearts their own will, but all the true sons of the Saviour will put aside their own will, and there will be only one will, universal, sovereign, and ruler, to animate, govern and direct all souls . . ."

Throughout these years, the Holy Spirit has taught us simple but wise ways to put the will of God into practice with maximum results, that is, to live the will of God in the present moment of our life (since the past is already gone and the future is not yet in our hands), to live it with perfection.

The will of God is a precious pearl; it has been for us the discovery of a way to sanctity good for everyone. Everyone in fact can do it whatever his or her state of life, situation or vocation may be. The will of God is the "ticket to sanctity" for the masses. Also in the documents of the Second Vatican Council we read that all the faithful are called to sanctity.

Chiara Lubich

(1) Teachings of Paul VI, Poliglotta Vaticana, 1968, VI pg. 302).

POVERTY IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

Part one

by Fr. Pascal Foresi

Everyone is aware that for Jesus and his disciples, poverty was fundamental. Who does not recall the words of the Sermon on the Mount, "How happy are the poor in spirit," or, as St. Luke says more simply, "How happy are you who are poor, yours is the Kingdom of God" (Luke 6:24).

Many have tried to form a synthesis of the doctrine of poverty found in the Gospels. Here I will examine only a few passages in order to see how Jesus lived poverty in a concrete way.

I think that this could also be very useful for understanding the meaning of his moral and pastoral discourses. We will examine a few of the most reliable and fundamental passages. Certainly the doctrine on poverty and wealth formulated in the words of Jesus, and recounted by the evangelists is extremely beautiful. However, it risks being misunderstood by many Christians.

How is it possible to live Jesus' doctrine on poverty? Throughout the centuries, various interpretations have come forward proposing ways to adapt this doctrine to the times. This is how the scandal among believers and non-believers alike, who see a dichotomy between the words of Jesus and the life of Christians, came about.

Nor has there been lacking an extreme and unjust idealization of Jesus' message as was espoused by "fraticelli," (1) and who, in 1323, were condemned by Pope John XXII. These people believed that Jesus could not have possessed anything, not even in common. Evidently, in addition to a criticism of the laxity of believers, there was also a Manichean vision of the goods of the earth underlying this position. Because of such misunderstandings it is — for the sake of theory — enlightening to consider how Jesus lived poverty. Let us note that Jesus reveals himself not as an ascetic separated from the world, but rather as someone who has renounced everything in order to live moderately, more freely, but without judging as bad what God has created. With his life, Jesus demonstrates that it is possible to live Christian poverty without falling into either a laxity which justifies wealth or into a too extreme austerity which denounces the good of God's creation.

Jesus appears as a man, as the Man par excellance who entrusted everything to Providence in order to bear witness to his dependence on God alone; yet at the same time, he knew how to use with simplicity the few possessions given to him for his sustenance and that of his disciples and in order to aid the poor.

(1) "Name applied to a number of medieval heretical sects on the fringes of the Franciscan Order."

The women who followed Jesus

"Now after this he made his way through towns and villages preaching, and proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom of God. With him went the Twelve, as well as certain women who had been cured of evil spirits and ailments: Mary surnamed the Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and several others who provided for them out of their own resources" (Luke 8:13).

This is one of the Gospel passages, recounted only by Luke, which I would call precious because in a few lines it delineates for us the actual life of Jesus during his apostolate.

When sending the apostles out to preach, he ordered them to take "...no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purses." (Mark 6:8) And in Mt.10:10, he added, "... for the workman deserves his keep."

Here we find this teaching as it was lived daily during the apostolic pilgrimage of Jesus. With the Twelve, there were probably also other disciples and various women, some of whom had been cured from demonic possession or illness. Mention is made of Mary, called the Magdalene because she came from Magdala, a city in Galilee not far from Tiberias. It is said that she was exorcised by Jesus who had freed her from seven demons (the number seven probably indicating the severity of the possession). Some have interpreted this phrase to mean that Mary Magdalene had been a sinner but we are not justified in saying this because throughout the New Testament, a clear-cut distinction is made between those obsessed by demons and sinners.

The novelty is that women were participants in the teaching of Jesus while in the rabbinical tradition, they were always excluded from hearing the teachers.

Another woman mentioned is Joanna, the wife of Chuza, one of Herod's attendants, who belonged to the elite class of people. This is a clear denial of the Marxist thesis (developed by Engels) which states that Christianity was originally an expression of the slaves and oppressed working class of the Roman Empire. From the very beginning we find in the Gospels, in the Acts and in the account of the lives of the first Christians, well-to-do and wealthy people who complied with Christ's message and gave, as in this case, at least part of their wealth to support Jesus. However, to draw from this a social doctrine which theologically justifies wealth, would be a totally unfounded interpretation of the text.

It is interesting to note that even though implied that the money was given for the Master, it is written that the women "assisted them with their goods" not they assisted "him" -- evidence that between the Master and the Twelve there was a total communion of goods.

This presentation of Jesus who lives without receiving any compensation for His teaching does not distinguish him from other rabbis of his time. They, too, lived as the poor; some worked, others were supported with contributions.

Also, the fact of pious women offering money was nothing new. The novelty is that women were participants in the teaching of Jesus while in the rabbinical tradition, they were always excluded from hearing the teachers. One sees in this the revolution that Jesus brings, even more underlined by Luke, who places women and the Twelve on the same level.

The temple tax

"When they reached Capernaum, the collectors of the half shekel came to Peter and said, "Does your master not pay the half shekel?" "Oh yes," he replied, and went into the house. But before he could speak, Jesus said, "Simon, what is your opinion? From whom do the kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their sons or from foreigners?" And when he replied, "From foreigners," Jesus said, "Well then, the sons are exempt. However, so as not to offend these people, go to the lake and cast a hook; take the first fish that bites, open its mouth and there you will find a shekel; take it and give it to them for me and for you." (Mt. 17:24—27)

This passage which is found only in the first Evangelist is rich in information.

The duty of giving two drachmas per person was an obligation for all Jews over twenty years of age, even if they resided outside Palestine.

It was one of the tax collectors who asked Peter if Jesus paid the tax. In fact, Judaism at that time was divided over the obligation of this tribute. The Pharisees acknowledged it as did the Jews residing outside Palestine, while the Sadducees and, it seems, the Galileans ignored it.

Peter immediately answered yes, evidently basing his answer on the way Jesus had acted in preceeding years. Then, on entering the house and even before speaking, Peter hears Jesus ask him, 'Are the sons of the kings exempt from taxes?' Peter says yes. In fact at that time in the Orient, taxes were paid to the king rather than to the state: it is evident, then, that the king's children, not the strangers, were exempt. With these words, the Evangelist clearly shows us Jesus revealing once more that He is the Son of God. The taxes are, in fact, for the Temple, and therefore, for God.

Jesus adds: 'However, so as not to offend these people, go to the lake and cast a hook; take the first fish that bites, open its mouth and there you will find a stater; take it and give it to them for me and for you."

The shekel was a coin which corresponded to twice the value of the "didramma"; each "dramma" was equal to one denaro; therefore a stater equaled four dramma or four denarii.

The first question which comes to mind is why Jesus would want to accomplish so original a miracle in favor of himself, something unique in the Gospel. The interpretations are varied; some say that the original version was: "Go, (fish) for a fish, sell it and pay the tax." But at present, almost no one accepts an interpretation so far removed from the text.

Another interpretation, which seems to be more logical, is that he may have wanted to work this miracle first because there was no money in the fund of the apostles, and second, because he wished to show that even though he submitted to Jewish norms out of love for God, God Himself intervenes to confirm his independence as Son of God.

There was much doubt about the possibility that a fish could have a coin in its mouth until a hypothesis was advanced that it was the "hemicronis sacra" also called St. Peter's fish, a a species found in Lake Tiberias. It holds its offspring in its mouth and, as they begin to grow, it takes a stone in its mouth to take up space, thus forcing out the little fish. Matthew's Gospel in this case put a stater instead of a stone in its mouth.

The fact that Jesus told Peter he would find in the fish's mouth a stater, that is, twice as much as was needed, and that he added: "...and you will give it to them for you and for Me," underscores again the special rapport between Jesus and Peter.

This episode shows us a moment in which the Master and the apostles possessed nothing.

The anointing at Bethany

"Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom he had raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for him there; Martha waited on them and Lazarus was among those at table. Mary brought in a pound of very costly ointment, pure nard, and with it anointed the feet of Jesus, wiping them with her hair; the house was full of the scent of the ointment. Then Judas Iscariot--one of his disciples, the man who was to betray him--said, "Why wasn't this ointment sold for three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor?" He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he was in charge of the common fund and used to help himself to the contributions. So Jesus said, "Leave her alone; she had to keep this scent for the day of my burial. You have the poor with you always, you will not always have me."

There are five separate passages of the Gospel which speak about the anointing of Jesus during his public life: Matthew 26:6, Mark 14:3, Luke 7:36 and in John 11:2 and 12:1. But only the passages in Matthew, Mark and John resemble one another.

During the dinner, a woman (according to Matthew and Mark); Mary of Bethany (according to John), approached Jesus carrying an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, pure nard. It weighed a "libra," more than half-a-pound. She broke the jar and anointed the head of Jesus--according to Matthew and Mark; his feet--according to John-probably both his head and feet--and dried his feet with her hair. "The house was full of the scent of the ointment." This note tells us that the writer was actually present at the meal.

At this, some (according to Mark), the apostles (according to Matthew), Judas (according to John) became indignant and said, "Why this waste of ointment? Ointment like this could have been sold for over 300 denarii and the money given to the poor" (Mark). According to John, it is Judas who makes this statement, "not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he was in charge of the common fund and used to help himself to the contributions." The intention here is to portray Judas as greedy and thieving. (Money would be the principle motive for betraying Jesus), the complete opposite of Mary, who is loving and giving.

We can understand the astonishment of the other disciples: three hundred denarii, was in fact, about the same as the annual salary of a farm-laborer of that time. This means that the perfume cost between five and ten hundred dollars.

The perfume from the nard was extracted from a plant from India and the Gospel says it was genuine. We know from Pliny that the cost of perfumes could have been exorbitant--even more than three hundred denarii.

The passage also indicates that the apostles had a fund and that part of the offerings given to the teacher were set aside for those in need. It would not seem unusual then to Judas or to the other apostles to put in the fund the three hundred denarii from the sale of the perfume.

But Jesus intervenes: "Leave her alone. Why do you criticize the woman? It is a good deed she has done for me. You will always have the poor with you but you will not always have me. By pouring this perfume on my body, she has started to prepare my body for burial. I assure you, wherever the good news is proclaimed throughout the world, what she has done will be spoken of as her memorial."

First of all Jesus praises her good deed and, quoting a phrase from Deuteronomy 15, 11, he affirms that the disciples and the apostles will always have the poor to help.

There are two fundamental interpretations of this juxtaposition of the costly anointment and the poor. The first holds that in the Old Testament, charity towards those who must be buried is given equal value with the giving of alms to the poor. Jesus, in this case, does not compare two good acts but rather, he reveals the profound significance of the anointing: the preparation of his body for burial. Others, however, view this passage as one which the evangelists wanted to underline as almost an echo of the disputes which rose among the first Christians between those who affirmed the superiority of worship and those who emphasized the socio-charitable distribution of money. We can find an echo of this dispute in the words of St. Paul in the First Letter to the Corinthians, "Even if I should give away all my possessions...but if I do not have charity, I gain nothing."

Considering this phrase "the poor you will always have with you," Jesus certainly does not want to present a social doctrine that excuses poverty. On the contrary, it will remain something to be fought against always as is implied in Jesus' words when he invites them to spend their future money on the poor.

The conclusion: "Wherever the good news is proclaimed throughout the world, what she has done will be spoken of as her memorial." This statement has caused much controversy. Many deny that Jesus could have said this phrase above all because of the word "good news" which appears in the Letters of Paul but it is not considered a word which Jesus used.

It may be that this is true but the important thing is that the evangelists have handed down to us the true sense of Jesus' words even if they used terms in later use.

One thing is certain: the implied prophecy continued in this passage has come true; wherever, in fact, the Gospel is preached, the woman who anointed the body of Jesus, in anticipation of his death, has always been remembered.

TO BE CONTINUED

WORD OF LIFE

"I am the vine
and you are the branches;
whoever remains in me
with me in him
bears fruit in plenty;
for cut off from me
you can do nothing."

(John 15, 5)

Can you imagine a branch cut off from the vine? It has no future, no hope; it is unproductive and there is nothing in store for it but to dry up and be burned.

Think of the spiritual death to which we are doomed as christians if we do not stay united to Christ. It is a frightening thought. It is complete sterility, even if we work hard from morn till night, even if our earthly goods increase — even if we make considerable sacrifices. All this may mean something to us here on earth, but it has no meaning for Christ and for eternity, and this is the life that really matters.

"I am the vine and you are the branches; whoever remains in me with me in him bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing" (John 15,5).

How can we remain in Christ and Christ remain in us? How can we be a green and vigorous branch which is one body with the vine?

We must, first of all, believe in Christ. But it is not enough. Our faith must determine the concrete dimension of our life. We must, in other words, live in conformity with this faith by putting Jesus' words into practice.

Thus we cannot neglect the divine tools which Christ has left to each one of us, the tools that will make it possible for everyone to achieve or to re-establish the unity which might have been broken.

And still, Christ will not feel that we are solidly in him, unless we make the effort to be part of our ecclesial community, our local Church.

"I am the vine and you are the branches; whoever remains in me with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing."

"Whoever remains in me with me in him."

Do you see how Jesus speaks not only of our unity with him, but also of his unity with us? If we are united to him, he is in us; he is present in the innermost part of our heart. And this initiates a rapport, a dialogue of mutual love and a coqperation between Jesus and us, his disciples.

And hence the result, bearing fruit in plenty, exactly as the branch that is solidly united to the vine bears excellent grapes.

"Fruit in plenty" means that we will be blessed with a truly apostolic life, namely with a capacity of opening the eyes of many to the unique, revolutionary words of Christ and the ability of giving them the strength to follow these words. "Fruit in plenty" also means that we will be able to inspire and even to start small or big projects to help suffering humanity. All this we will do in accordance with the gifts that God has given us.

"Fruit in plenty" means "plenty" not "scarce," and this might mean that we will know how to create for the people around us an atmosphere of goodness, of mutual love, the sense of a christian community.

"I am the vine and you are the branches; whoever remains in me with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing."

But "fruit in plenty" does not only mean the spiritual and material well-being of others, but our own as well.

Our inner growth, as well as our personal sanctification depend on our being united to Christ.

Sanctification. Perhaps, in these times of ours, this word may seem anachronistic and useless to many, or something far away as a utopia.

It is not so. These present times will pass and these partially erroneous and contingent views will pass with them. What remains is the truth. Two thousand years ago Paul, the apostle, said clearly that sanctification is God's will for all christians. Theresa of Avila, a doctor of the Church, is certain that everyone may reach the highest contemplation. The Second Vatican Council declares that all the faithful are called to sanctity.

Let us work then so that we, too, may gather "fruit in plenty" in sanctity which we can do only if we are united in Christ.

"I am the vine and you are the branches; whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing."

Have you noticed how Jesus does not look at the fruit directly, but looks at it only as a result of our remaining united to him?

It might be that some of us, too, fall into the error of so many christians who believe only in activism and more activism — and projects and more projects for the good of others — without taking the time to ask themselves whether they are fully united to Christ. It is a mistake; they think they are bearing fruit, but it is far less than what they could bear having Christ in them and with them.

If we want to bear fruit that will last and that will have the imprint of the divine, we must remain united to Christ; and the more we remain united to Christ, the more fruit we will bear.

The very verb "remain" used in this sentence, gives you an idea that this bearing fruit, is not a momentary but rather a permanent condition.

If you know people who live this way, you will see, in fact, how even a smile, a word, a simple everyday gesture, an attitude in a given situation enables them to touch other peoples' hearts even to the point of leading them back to God.

EXPERIENCES

Each month a "Word of Life" appears in Living City or in its Supplement. The following are experiences that some of our readers shared with us in living the Word of Life.

(continued from page 7)

This was the way of the saints, but we also should try and not get discouraged. All christians are capable of bearing fruit. Let me tell you a story.

It happened in Portugal. Maria do Socorro had just started college in a very tense environment. Many of her companions were involved in fights, each according to his or her own ideology and each trying to win over the students who had not joined any group as yet.

Maria knew what to do, even though it was not easy to explain it to her friends. She wanted to follow Christ and to remain united to him. Her companions, however, who knew nothing about her, labeled her wishy-washy, a girl without ideals. At times she felt awkward when they saw her go to Church, but she went on, just the same, because she felt she had to remain united to Jesus.

Christmas approached. Maria was aware that among the students there were some who could not go home because they lived too far away. She then suggested to her other companions to get together and give them presents. To her great surprise all agreed right away.

Later there were school elections and another big surprise awaited her; she was elected as representative of her class. Her amazement was even greater, however, when her friends told her that it was only logical she should be elected, being the only one who followed a precise line of conduct. "You know what you want — they said — and how to go about accomplishing it. Now some of them want to find out more about the ideal of her life and live it with her. It is a good fruit of Maria do Socorro's perseverance in remaining united to Jesus.

Chiara Lubich

AT THE AIRPORT

On a foggy Friday afternoon I once tried to get a flight to Texas in a hurry. I had been at the gate only a few minutes when I realized that the plane would not be leaving on time. Announcements about the delay became always more mysterious as the time went by until we were informed that the aircraft in question had to land in Newark and was waiting there for clearance to fly back to New York and pick us up.

Meanwhile passengers to another destination but leaving from the same gate began to arrive.

The atmosphere became tense. I saw that the gentleman sitting next to me was jotting a few notes on a piece of paper. "I am writing to the President of the airline," he said, "even if I know that it won't help."

Seats were scarce, so when I got up to make a phone call I left my books and papers on the chair where I was sitting. To my surprise, when I came back to the lounge I couldn't see my empty seat. I looked around and finally spotted my belongings on the floor, right in the middle of the aisle. A lady was happily sitting on my chair knitting a sweater. At first I couldn't believe it, but before I could open my mouth a thought flashed through my mind, "What you do to her you do to Jesus." She looked at me and I told her, "Don't get up. You must be tired too." She smiled and went on knitting without hesitation, and I began to collect my things and see if I could sit on the edge of a little table.

The businessman looked up and was surprised to see that I was smiling. He blushed and got up and gave me his seat. "Just for a while," he said. He was embarrassed to be kind, but happy. Now it was almost as if we knew one another, all in the same situation even if we reacted to it very differently. I began to read my book, the lady kept knitting, the gentleman kept going back and forth from the counter, trying to get on another flight, buying more tickets and almost getting on the plane to Atlanta in a rush when that flight departed from our gate. But he laughed when we stopped him and smiled also when he couldn't help running to the gate when our flight was finally announced, almost as if that would get him faster to his destination.

All different, but a little act of love had bound us together for a few hours.

S. A.

MANY SURPRISES

This month, living according to the word of life meant trying to do well each moment the will of God without thinking if one thing was more important than the other, but only if it was the will of God. I had many surprises. I saw that the normal way I tend to think — worrying if this or that is going to work out, always being ahead of myself — was really very limiting. I saw that God works out all the details. I got more and better rest. I was able to spend more and better time with the family. I was able to extend myself to many more people (I got in touch with many people I hadn't talked with in a long time); my prayer life was more regular and deeper (I felt a much richer union with God); I was able to advance my cultural and career formation more effectively; my finances organized themselves in such a way that I was able to have more of a surplus for the needs of others; and even the little needs and details of my job were taken care of.

There were a few instances at work that really surprised me. I am Assistant Promotion Director of a company and I was asked to do some thinking on a promotion idea that related to a new type of lock. I noted the job down on my calendar, but things got so busy that, beyond my control, I wasn't able to attend to my schedule for a period, so the project slipped to the back of my mind. Then a salesman came to see me concerning another project. I was very busy and only wanted to spend the bare amount of time necessary for him to give me information on this project. But then, he began to look for more business because he handled other lines. Thinking of the word of life, to do well the little things, I thought it was better to spend a few more minutes and try to love this man by trying to refer him to others in our organization who might give him business. Then I spent a few moments and let him show me a catalog of the other lines. Well, the last thing he showed me was . . . a brochure on just the exact type of lock I had pictured in my mind for our promotion. Moreover, he had a sample with him which saved me the time of having one ordered. I thought to myself how wonderful is God's love. He gets down to the very details of my life, moment by moment in the little things of each day.

L. S.

CHANGE OF DIRECTION

I have three young children ages 6,4 and 1 year and I'm home a lot. Sometimes, while the baby sleeps and the children play outside I ride my bike up and down the street just to get some exercise and relax. I look forward to the peace and quiet also. But sometimes as I start to ride the eight year old girl next door starts to follow me and ride along. Then I have to look out for her and tell when I'll turn, etc. I felt a little upset at first, but I knew the right thing to do was to love her. When I loved her the ride became peaceful again and sometimes more enjoyable.

The other day for some reason I felt a little down. Perhaps I was a little sick. The children were asking me to make Christmas cards. I spent some time with them and then I went to do some work. One of them called me to help again and I felt impatient, but immediately I knew this wasn't the love that is vigilant in each moment. "Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come." (Mt. 24:42) I walked back to where the children were working and carefully drew a bell for them to color. This small act of love seemed to change the direction of the entire day.

P. H.

MANY CHANCES TO LOVE

It was snowing out and my five year old wanted to go out to play. He came to me while I was ironing and asked me to put on his boots. I said to him "Just a minute." Then I remembered he was Jesus to love. I put down the iron to help him. He went out and I went back to my ironing. In a few minutes he came in and asked for a drink of water. What came to my mind was "Whatsoever you do to the least you do to me." I gave him his drink and he went out again. Once more I tried to do the ironing. The bell rang and now he needed some buttons for his snowman's eyes. I was about to tell him he couldn't keep coming in and out, but when I looked at him so sincere and serious about these buttons, again I remembered he was Jesus to love. To love him I had to be one with him, so I began to look for some buttons but really caring about picking them out. I gave them to him and he was really so pleased. After this he played out all afternoon and I could see the love I showed him remained with him and this gave me such joy and I even finished the ironing.

R. D.

A busy day

It was one of those busy Saturdays in our house. The children were very active in their many projects, my husband was busy working around the house, and I was in the kitchen trying to prepare dinner early for the family. We were to leave the house very early that evening to attend a family wedding.

As the day went on, I could feel that things were not going as well as I had hoped for. The children kept coming in and out of the house. Many times I had to stop what I was doing to help one of them out. The project my husband chose to work on happened to be right in the kitchen, where I was working most of the day. All these things kind of slowed me up more and more. I found myself every once in a while looking at the clock on the wall and saying to myself, "I'll never make it on time." Without realizing it, I was becoming more and more uneasy inside, and as the day progressed the tension grew in me.

At a certain moment it came time to leave the house. As I sat in the car I felt inside of myself a lack of peace. I realized at that moment that I had been burdened with my own plans, my own way of doing things, and had not been able to love those around me the way I knew I should. This failure of not loving was a big suffering for me, and at that moment I asked Jesus, with all my heart, to help me to love as I knew he loves, and that I only wanted what was God's will for me, not mine. This left me with a great peace inside.

As we continued to drive my husband and I began to talk more freely to one another, and you could feel that a deeper relationship was being established. We took the wrong cut off on the highway, which took us way out of our way, and we had to back track through the city, which delayed us even more. But it seemed that it didn't matter anymore, whether we were a little late or not, what counted was this love that we had again between us.

We arrived just on time, as everyone had just been seated. I had a strong impression inside, that my heart had stretched a little, and I was able to love a little more all those people I was going to be with that evening.

Rose Belcher

The elevator

I work on the 29th floor and this particular morning, like so many other times, I got into an elevator. While going up, suddenly there were noises as if steel was falling all around the elevator. It was very loud, it seemed something had broken. Then, a lot of smoke poured into the elevator and with a jerk the elevator halted. We were suspended somewhere. Now and then you could hear little pieces of metal falling. There were about seven other people in the car besides myself. Right away there was panic. In those first moments I, too, felt fear sweep right through me. I thought, "I really wonder if the cable will break." The noise was loud and frightening. It seemed everyone had the same thought at once...the emergency alarm. Everyone reached for it. I found myself reaching for that button just like everyone else. Over the little intercom inside we could hear someone say, "What's wrong?" Several ladies began shouting at once, "Help us." A man tried to shout over them and then there was silence. I thought to myself, 'I would like to do something for those who are afraid' but I knew in such a situation there are no words on earth that can be comforting. Again, I realized that we could all die. I tried to see before God if I was ready to meet him and I experienced a suffering thinking of all the times I hadn't loved him. I thought to myself, "But I need more time." I understood, however, that I had "that moment" and I tried with all my strength to say a final "yes" to Jesus coming to me in that suffering. I was no longer afraid. There was even a kind of calmness in the elevator. Only a few words spoken now and then. The horrible fright that had taken hold of everyone had disappeared.

After what seemed like an eternity a voice came over the intercom saying they would ease the elevator-car down very slowly. Finally, after reaching the ground, the doors had to be opened by hand. Everyone got off but no one spoke. I looked at a lady who seemed a little shaken before and she smiled. I was happy, too. The experience was over but I know that love will remain.

Kim Bieganski

A BIG OPPORTUNITY

Two weeks ago I was on lock-up duty at the garage where I work. That meant getting up earlier to unlock the building and to be the last one to leave in order to lock it up. On Wednesday the janitor comes in, in the afternoon, to clean up and he leaves around 6:00 PM when everybody has gone, even the guy on lock-up. That Wednesday he came in as usual. Everybody else was gone and I was ready to leave too. It was around 4:30 PM. We started talking and he told me all about his past life when he was logging and when he was in the army. I was getting bored and hungry because it was supper time and supper is over by 6:00 PM at the cafeteria. But then I thought about the Ideal I was trying to live and the word of life so this was a big opportunity for me to love for real. I listened attentively instead of just pretending to listen. We talked and talked and he told me all these army stories and I listened while he was doing his cleaning. At times I thought "What am I doing here? I'm going to miss supper," but then I'd get back very quickly to his story and forget about myself. It was past 6:00 PM by the time we got out of there and outside while we were locking the gate he asked me my name and where I was from and I told him and we spoke a bit more and I could see on his face that he was feeling better. He went off with a smile on his face and I did too because I had succeeded in loving.

J. M.

A NEW RAPPORT

Over the years, I had had many problems with my teenage daughter. Our friction was a long-standing reality. I realized that I could not tell her anything without her becoming very defensive. This, in turn, made me feel hurt and then very angry. While I knew that I loved my daughter very much, I could not forget some of the unkind words spoken in the past. Thus, the warmth that I showed to her was not genuine.

But now I knew that I could see her with new eyes; I could forget past actions and words, and I really could love her anew. If she did not respond at first, then this would be suffering to love as my way to love Jesus in that moment. My love for her would remain, as strong as ever. As I left the Mariapolis (1), with all of this fresh and beautiful in my heart, I was anxiously waiting to start living this new relationship with her. I felt very happy and excited.

The first day home was great! I felt a great love for my family who greeted me with such joy, and I felt that special love for my daughter. She responded to me in a new way also. I thought to myself that this was going to be even greater than I had expected, as Jesus had clearly touched her also. She was so warm and open.

Then, that very afternoon as I sat down to relax, I picked up a paperback novel and began to page through it. I was shocked to see its contents. When I inquired as to its owner, I was told that it belonged to my teenage daughter. I spoke with my husband about the book, and we agreed that we had to speak to her.

With my new love for her, I felt that I could be the one to talk to her, and I was confident that she would not misunderstand. This would be quite an accomplishment considering our past. Just the suggestion that I would try to handle a delicate situation like this with her would have had my husband wanting to lock me into a closet and trying to convince me to let him handle it alone. But now he seemed to sense that it was important for me to do it.

As my daughter and I began to talk, she told me that a friend had just given the book to her. I asked her to read a particular paragraph and then tell me if she still wanted to continue reading the novel. She read it and then just looked

at me in silence. I explained to her that just as I had protected her from harm when she was small, I would continue to protect her now, because I still loved her very much. I then told her that I would now leave her free to decide what she would do. She said nothing, but she looked at me with kindness as she walked away. Feeling that the atmosphere was really one of love, I felt a great joy.

About an hour later, she came up to me, put her arm around me and said, "Mom, I really don't need that book." I felt this was the beginning of a new relationship with my daughter and I am certain that my love for him had something to do with it.

M. K.

(1) Week-long summer gathering of the Focolare.

UNITY RESTORED

Jim and I and our three small children recently bought and moved into an older home. Naturally there is work to do, painting, plastering and so on. Since I am in the house much of the day I see exactly what needs to be done but am unable to do much about it. In the small amount of time available in the evenings we find ourselves completing the routine chores, so work is going ahead at a slow pace.

It is a source of frustration to me not to be able to finish the work quickly and I have to be careful not to take this frustration out on Jim or the kids.

One night I had to go out, and at dinner Jim said he thought he'd finish painting the foyer. I was very happy that he would do this and said so.

When I returned late that evening I found things pretty much as I had left them, and Jim — sound asleep in the children's room. I didn't wake him at that moment. I was too disappointed and didn't want to say something in anger. Instead I went back downstairs and started on the dishes. On other occasions, though I wanted to be calm and understanding, as soon as I'd open my mouth angry feelings would surface.

This time I was determined not to let that happen. Thinking of the Word of Life, "Whatever you ask the Father in my name, He will give you," I asked for the grace to keep loving.

After a few minutes I could hear him coming down the stairs, but very slowly, not sure what my reaction would be. When he came within earshot I forced myself to call "Hello!" as cheerfully as possible, even though I didn't feel too happy. "Hi!" he said, coming into the kitchen, a little surprised by my greeting. "You must have been really tired", I said. We talked for a little while and I realized that it was no longer an effort not to be upset. My anger had vanished.

My prayer had really been answered, and the unity between me and Jim grew that evening.

K. W.

NOW IS THE RIGHT TIME

It seems the very hardest for me to live the word of God when I am very tired. Then it's very easy to think of myself instead of my brother, which most times is one of our three daughters. As a parent, one of my main concerns is that my children will always be able to come to me with any problems or questions they may have. I pray to always be understanding and listen.

One night after a very long day, I found myself exhausted and longing for that quiet time after the children are in bed. Finally, after a half hour of procrastinating and "just one more hug" or "one more drink" they were in bed, and I sat down to relax. It wasn't five minutes when our oldest daughter called for me to come to her room. Being tired, I really wanted to tell her to just go to sleep, I wanted to rest. But something inside of me suggested that I must love her right now at this moment. I went to her room and found her crying and extremely upset over a magazine she had seen that day at a friend's house. She had many questions and was frightened over the whole thing. We had a beautiful talk. God seemed to help me say the right words to help her calm down. And several times since she has come to us before falling asleep when anything is bothering her. I am so thankful I went to her that night. The desire I have that my children can always come to me was rewarded by a small act of love.

D. H.

WORD OF LIFE FOR MARCH

"Sell your possessions and give alms. Get yourselves purses that do not wear out, treasure that will not fail you, in heaven where no thief can reach it and no moth destroy it."

(Luke 12:33)

A NEIGHBOR

A friend of ours lives in our house. We made an apartment for him on the third floor, when our son got married. We tried to do everything perfectly for him, to make him feel welcome and at home with his new surroundings. I also told him he was welcome to use the washing machine, in fact, I insisted.

Well, one day he used the machine and I heard the motor start to run. All of a sudden, there was silence. The first thing that came to my mind was that he had broken the machine and I wondered why I had been so stupid to let him use it.

Then I thought, "If I were in his place, how would I feel?" Instead of running to the laundry room and saying, "What have you done?", I went to love, thinking all the time of the word of life, "do unto others as you would have them do to you." When I entered the room, he was just standing there looking bewildered and kind of guilty. I explained to him that he had overloaded the machine. When I took some of the heavy things out, the machine started. He was so relieved! (So was I.)

F. M.

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my child and god
by anne marie zanzucchi
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freedom and truth

I was born in Cuba, the oldest of three girls. Being the only child for ten years, I became rather spoiled. Then, in 1962, my family and I came to the United States. My four-year-old sister and I were the first to come, and my parents came three months later with my other sister.

Up to this point in my life, my parents had tried to do everything they could to spare my sisters and me as much suffering as possible. Now, at fourteen years of age, I was suddenly faced with the reality of suffering, of being alone in a strange country without family or friends, without knowing the language or having material possessions. Suddenly, all of my dreams collapsed; I felt I had grown up in a day. It was a hard awakening.

The first few years were difficult. We lived in many different cities, trying to find a place to settle down. For the first year, my mother was homesick, and she wanted to go back.

During this period, I felt very close to God. I remember going to visit him in the small chapel of the school I attended and telling him all my troubles, as well as my joys. He gave me the strength to go ahead.

As the years went by, things gradually got better. Now we had friends, and our financial situation had improved. In the same measure that things started to go well, I started to forget about God. Yes, I still went to church on Sundays, but that was the extent of my Christianity.

I used to think of myself as a dreamer of a world that didn't exist. All my life I have had a great love for freedom and truth. And starting a new life in a new country, I had thought I would find the freedom and the truth that I had always searched for. Instead, I was disappointed by many things. I dreamed of a world where people would treat each other as brothers, and I saw that the reality was quite different.

Ten years later, I had everything a young person my age could ever want out of life. I enjoyed my work and had many friends. I was studying at night, something I had always wanted to do, and I had just bought a new car, fulfilling a long-time dream.

I thought I could find happiness doing all the things young people enjoy doing, going to the movies and parties, playing tennis, and so forth. But inside of me there was much anxiety. In fact, a real battle was going on. I asked myself, "Is it possible that there is nothing else to life? Is it possible that one day I will die and there will be nothing left?" For I had found that a new car could make me happy for a few days, a party for a few hours. I wanted much more out of life. I couldn't explain it, not even to my closest friends, for I didn't know myself what I wanted.

At this point I was invited to a Mariapolis. I had been to two Mariapolises a few years before, but this time I was going ready to listen without reservation.

I remember driving to the Mariapolis with a family that had four children. There were many opportunities to love in the twelve hours that it took us to get there. I thought that it was a preparation for me, and as we entered the university where it was going to be held, I told Jesus, "Here I am, ready to do whatever you want from me."

The next day he took me by my word, One of the workshops that year consisted in going door to door to invite the people of the town for the festival that takes place the last night of the Mariapolis. I was in this workshop, and my first reaction was to try to escape from

"But inside of me there was much anxiety. In fact, a real battle was going on. . . . I discovered that true freedom was found in loving my brothers, and that in God there was the real truth."

doing it. But I remembered what I had promised to Jesus on arriving there. The first day we were supposed to go out to invite people, I couldn't find my group. As I started walking back to my room, I thought to myself, "Well, it is not my fault if they weren't there." Again I remembered the promise and went back to look harder for my group. I found them, and we went to invite the people of the town. For the first time, I was loving with a pure love. I was doing something I wouldn't have done for anyone else but for God.

What did I find at that Mariapolis? To put it into one word — God. It was a beautiful discovery for me to realize that he loves me personally and that he has given his life for me. It struck me like lightning what these people were trying to do, to work so that "All May Be One" (1). For a moment I understood the greatness of this undertaking, a revolution of love that could change the whole world, and I wanted to be part of it. I discovered that true freedom was found in loving my brothers, and that in God there was the real truth, because "He is the Truth and the Light" (2).

When I went home, I tried to keep living this life of the Gospel that I had experienced there. I had always felt free to tell my parents what I was doing and and where I was going, because there was so much respect and trust on their part. So now that I had found the most beautiful of all treasures, how could I keep it to myself? So I told them my experience. They didn't understand me, but my father said, "Yes, we realized that something had happened to you. You've changed."

I tried to live what I had understood, with my parents, my sisters, and my friends. I lived in a city where there wasn't a Focolare Center. Since there was something that attracted me about the life in the Focolare, I kept in touch by phone, by letter, and by traveling back and forth from Washington, D.C. to New York.

One of my first experiences, which was very simple but which I have never forgotten, was with a girl at work. She was new, and everyone in the office disliked her because we had always helped each other whenever we had finished our work. She, instead, felt that whenever she had finished her own work, she was finished for the day. One day she was typing an urgent letter, and she told me how thirsty she was. The first thing that came to my mind was to say, "too bad." But then I remembered the Word of Life "Whatever you do for the least of my brothers, you do it for me" (3). Here was my brother who was thirsty; it cost me a lot to go and get that glass of water. But from then on, a new rapport existed between us.

I tried to live this life with my family. With my sisters, I tried to listen to them and to help them. Before, many times I had told them what to do. And to live it with my mother meant to love her in many different ways, like to do the dishes and to help her with the housework, all the little things that I hadn't done too much before. With my father, it meant to take the time to sit and talk with him instead of doing something else.

The more I tried to live this life, the more I felt that Jesus was calling me, "to leave home, brothers or sisters, mother or father . . . for him and for the Gospel" (4). There was only one thing stopping me, I loved my family very much.

One day at Mass the Gospel was about the rich young man, and I understood that we can be rich in many things. I didn't have material wealth. Instead, my wealth was the love I had for my family, and the responsibility I felt for them.

They had suffered a lot, and I wanted to spare them more suffering. There were a few problems, and I wanted to resolve them before following Jesus. It was as if I was telling him, "Wait a while, give me a little time. I will follow you, but let me resolve my family's problems first."

Then the day came when I felt very strongly that this was the moment to leave. Humanly speaking, it was the worst time, for the problems weren't solved. Instead, they were complicated by the fact that my father and mother were having health problems. But I had the conviction that Jesus loved not only me, but he loved my parents and my sisters, too. He loved each of them personally, and he could take care of them better than I could. And during these years, I have experienced many times how true this is, for every time they needed help, there was someone there to help them.

He was asking me "to leave father, mother . . . and follow him." And what could I answer to such a great love, other than "Yes, I want to give my life for the fulfillment of your wish, 'That All May Be One'."

Maria Pereira

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(1) John 17,21
(2) John 14,6
(3) Matthew 25,40
(4) Mark 10,29

Eyes

Eyes
Eyes of a crowd that moves
relentlessly
like the wave of an ocean
without end.
Eyes,
I look and I hold on to my soul
not to be lost into the abyss
staring at me through them.
A scary lifeless abyss.
Eyes
And I hold on to my soul
not to be lost into their screaming
loneliness.
I hold onto my soul
when eyes of stone
cutting like icy blades
look into my eyes
And the wave keeps moving
moving and moving
carrynig within itself a treasure
of immense suffering.
And I hold on to you
and in those eyes I find you
I find you in the depth of
the abyss staring at me
from the crowd
in the coldness of a glance
that doesn't see me
in the solitude of a man
that walks beside me
I find you because you too
cried out your own cry of
infinite anguish, of total
abandonment, of immense
loneliness,
your cry of infinite love.
I find you and I love you
and I make their suffering,
I make your suffering,
my own.

Ellen

'I have lived three lives'

Maria Brasile's experience as a mother and as a teacher was grounded in a deep love for God and total commitment. She was a pioneer of pre-school education in Italy and her work was recognized by the World Organization for Pre-School Education. Her spiritual testament is an inspiration for all who seek to build a new society. Her daughter tells us of her life in the following article.

As well as a mother and educator, Maria Brasile, was also a married focolarina. The focolarini are totally consecrated members of the Focolare Movement. The married focolarini, though remaining in their own families, have the same total commitment to God within the Movement.

THE FIRST LIFE

My mother used to say, "I have lived three lives." She wrote in her journal, 'When I was nine, at the time of my first Communion. I began an intimate dialogue with Someone who attracted me, but also frightened me. I grew up amidst the tears of my widowed mother, coming into contact with good and evil things which I did not understand. I entered adolescence a sad person but in love with God, for without doubt he, my secret friend, held me in the hollow of his hand. I was sure that when the time came I would seek God in the silence of the cloister.' But that was not to be her path.

'The human reality of motherhood attracted me, and I longed to hold in my arms the most defenseless and tender creatures in the world. I decided to marry. But after only two years my husband died, and I was left with my health weakened and two babies to care for. Slowly, because the tough experience had caused a spiritual upheaval within me, I regained my contact with God.

'But another difficult time began around 1930. I became scrupulous, and I remember suffering real agonies as a result of this. I felt I owed God everything — the entire offering of my heart — and my instinctive clinging with tenderness to everything around me, things and people, occasioned endless remorse.'

'I ached for human warmth and the stimulus of the exploration of the minds of other people, and when I met a man whom I could trust, I married again.

'In that period I was so relaxed and serene that I almost forgot God. My strong and committed Catholic faith grew weak through the influence of my husband's theosophical belief which destroyed the secret channel of grace within me, and raised the demon of pride and arrogance. I stressed my own personality and gave way to my inclinations and impulses. I knew the chaos of desire, the weakening of the will, and the dizziness of feeling myself emptied of all capacity for strength or dignity — the horror of myself.'

AN ENCOUNTER IN FLORENCE

'While I was in Florence, struggling by the means of a brief holiday to recover my equilibrium following a period of extreme exhaustion, I met again a friend who had been very dear to me during my girlhood. She was an unusual person, and I had suffered and struggled a great deal for her for many years.'

(Mother, in fact, had tried to help her and prevent her from going off the deep end, but to no avail).

'One day life separated us, and I knew she had plumbed the depths of degradation and despair.

'But now I had found her again; a new creature, speaking to me with the serenity, wisdom and strength I had begged for her all that while ago. She spoke to me of God, who was at last her life — indeed the only life left to her at the lonely end of everything. Listening to her, I remembered how much I had prayed for her, and suddenly a great light flooded into me. I understood that God watches and waits, and slowly and surely leads all human pains and torments into port, to calm them in the sublime possession of the Truth. I realized that as he had followed step by step this girl who had been dear to me in him — whom I had loved in the Spirit — then he was also certainly watching over me. He was waiting for me too.

'I began again to meditate and pray, and wait. And on Holy Thursday 1940 he suddenly came. I think there had been, some time previously, a secret coming. As I was going up the steps of the church to Mass one morning I had felt a sort of call — "Give yourself to Me, completely." What can you say when Love calls? From then on I was living in this secret choice while continuing school and family life as usual.'

THE SECOND LIFE

In 1946, the war having ended, she was asked to be President of the C.I.F. and the Catholic Women's Federation of of Lanciano, where she lived.

'I had to represent all the Catholic women of the town in the communal and welfare field' she wrote. 'Up to then all my work had taken place in the home or school, and the call was so unexpected that for me it was a sign from God.'

She immediately became involed in a practical way, as was her nature, in a constructive plan for the formation of a Children's Village hoping thereby to remove the gangs of children from the streets of Lanciano, where they, like many others in Italian towns in the post war period, were trying to make a living by petty thieving.

'Then came political involvement and I dared to write on the town's manifestoes the words of St. Catherine of Siena, "If you will be what you should be, you will set the whole of Italy ablaze!"

THE LAUNCHING OF A TEACHER-TRAINING PROGRAM

Following a visit from a member of the Association for International Aid, a society concerned with the rescue of children, Maria wrote, 'We decided that together we would open a small pilot program for the training of infant teachers, hoping to draw attention to the fact that the quality of the development of small children depends very largely on the personality and professional training of the teacher.'

She herself tells us about the beginnings of these ventures into teacher-training.

'We began with temporary accommodation, often in my own home, then in the buildings of an open-air school which had been put out of action by the war. We had a small class of 25 children of poor family background and one mistress with a kind and gifted personality, under the guidance of an educational expert.'

They began a course of training, authorized by the Ministry of Education, for about 50 nursery-school teachers who used the class for experience in practical teaching. Their professor of philosophy, Vincenzo Bellisario, later became the undersecretary to the Minister of Education. The foundation of the program was that education was to be given based on human and christian values. Psychology was taught 'in living the experience of discovery of the child, and the discovery of oneself. The teachers listened and observed, and used not only their brains but their hands as well; they had to clean and paint the school and the old furniture, put pictures on the walls, and build simple equipment, beginning with a puppet theater. They collected old tins and jam jars, and made use of left-overs from the war for the children's play

things. They learned to live as the children learned to live; they opened the closed windows of their hearts and minds in order to admit the experience of others.'

THE TEACHERS BEGIN THEIR WORK IN THE VILLAGES

'At the end of the course the fifty teachers were ready to go to the half-destroyed mountain villages, in pairs, wherever they could find a well-disposed mayor or parish priest, and installed themselves in one or two hastily repaired vacant buildings. Meanwhile, from the town of Lanciano, tied to the roofs of crowded, swaying mail-coaches went little wooden tables, and chairs, and what little equipment there was for the new schools in the distant villages, where the small children and their parents were waiting for them.

'The young teachers went off on their adventurous journeys poorly equipped by International Aid and for a wretched wage. Some reached villages a thousand meters up the mountains, Gamberale . . . Pizzoferrato . . ., and about thirty of them in the plain, often ploughing their way through deep snow.

'But there was no lack of courage and endurance. By the time spring came the children had learnt to see each other as brothers, to wash themselves properly, to play together, to discover the world and to love life. And with them the illiterate mothers learned too — a tough people, rough but honest families who had grown up in a bitter and difficult environment, in the silence and solitude of the Abruzzi of those times.'

THE EXPANSION OF MARIA BRASILE'S INFLUENCE

Three years after the beginning of this enterprise there rose up in Lanciano a small building, surrounded by trees, which the establishing committee called "The Experimental Nursery School" and and which in 1959 was granted a Charter. This little seed, thrown out by a humble resident of Lanciano, was to foster an expansion into the national and international field of education. In 1949 my mother was invited to Prague to take part in the first world congress of O.M.E.P. (The world organization for pre-school education).

'I remember,' she wrote, 'that Charles, a friend of President Masaryk, who was assassinated shortly afterwards, spoke at the opening of the Congress in the great hall of the University. His humane and noble words sounded like a testament (they were forbidden to be reported by somebody). This phrase struck me: "The barriers which divide us go through the hearts of men".'

Her contribution at the Congress was made on these lines: 'Peace, from now on, will depend largely on the ability of man to live in harmony with his family and the nations of the world. Early childhood is the base on which the future life of cooperation within the great human community will be constructed.'

She continued her international connections by taking part in the second Congress in Paris in 1949, at which she stated: 'We have launched a formidable undertaking, but we are inspired by the conviction that to create a healthy, harmoniuos, courageous world, we must persuade those who direct the social and educational policies to recognize the needs of children.'

She took part in other conferences: 1950 in Vienna and 1958 in Brussels. I started accompanying her in 1960 to the conference at Zagreb, 1962 in London 1964 Stockholm, 1968 Washington, and her last conference in 1974 in Caracas.

Meanwhile, in Rome in 1963, A.N.E.P.(the National Association of Pre-School Teachers) was launched, for the express needs of those teachers who had worked in the Abruzzi region since 1946. From 1965 to 1970 my mother was the leader of about thirty refresher courses for nursery-school teachers in different regions of southern Italy, through the collaboration of the Experimental Nursery School at Lanciano and A.N.E.P. And during the same period there were ten courses subsidized by the *Cassa del Mezzogiorno* (the Southern Regional Development Board) for the promotion of social conditions in the south.

THE THIRD LIFE

In the meantime something happened which was of great importance for my mother. Her third life began in November, 1959. She herself tells us: 'I went to a two-day retreat with the Catholic graduates. I went full of doubts and anguish - then a great peace came over me, like a secret annunciation. A few days later I met two focolarine, and we decided to meet again.

'One Sunday, with my husband and daughter, I went to a meeting at Grottaferrata where I met about a hundred people. I heard old and new words, the very words of the gospel, but felt an inexplicable emotion, because in their eyes, in their smiles I glimpsed Someone talking to me in my brother. I was severely shaken, and yet I understood so little. It took me nearly two years to understand more but in 1961 I became a married focolarina, consecrated to God.

'What had changed? What had I received? After my meeting with the Focolare Movement, which enabled me to rediscover Jesus in my brother, I was immediately different. I remember that I suddenly became unable to give way to anger. Jesus within me had become Jesus outside me as well, looking at me. I was between two fires. I was lovingly constrained to change my direct vertical relationship with God to a horizontal one, which is through man.

'I feel turned inside out, like a glove,' she had written during a meeting of the movement in April 1960, 'with all the secret wrinkles of my soul exposed. Maybe I know many things, have done many things - I think so, anyway! But the smallest and most ignorant of the girls around me knows much more than I do, and her simplest words have a wisdom which amazes me. The brief candid phrase spoken by one of them throws a sudden light on all my complications, and brings the chaos of the "too much" and the "useless" back to the simple and straight truth. An "easy" spirituality, a calm life with no disturbances and storms are far off now. Bit by bit I feel myself urged on and carried away, and almost every hour I have to make definite decisions of choice.'

It was the beginning of a new path.

'My God,' she wrote in January, 1971, 'if I was able to put into words what you are to me! If I could only describe the soft touch which melts my hard heart,

the secret thrill, the love with which you surround me, your soundless word which transfixes me, and your look which annihilates me and yet gives me life. If you are like this for me, I beg you, make yourself known to the others also. But perhaps they already know it, and in their desperation are searching for you, because they have caught a glimpse of you.'

'In 1961, (I was already a focolarina) one morning at dawn, between sleeping and waking, while there passed before the eyes of my spirit a vision of the years to come, of that which I would be able to do and bear witness to, a wordless conviction came to me -ten years! Fearfully at first, I thought that that was the lenght of life remaining for me, but gradually I became more and more at peace with the thought.'

Actually these years proved to be the most intense period of all her work in the educational field, after which, being physically exhausted, she would have to entrust the school at Lanciano to the care of other.

'I tried to strip off with great difficulty the cares and anxieties, the preoccupations of the past years,' was how she described the new road, 'in order to be free from everything completely available to God. Tomorrow I shall go to Lanciano to hand over the school. Today I shall introduce the schedule of courses and seminars for 1971, after which everything can be left to others. I am available to God and nothing else matters.'

Meanwhile, her spiritual maturity was deepening.

'I am becoming more and more aware of a deep interior change, a call which is slowly effecting a more intimate union with God's plan. I am merging with the will of God and his Kingdom, and it is necessary for this to be apparent — to others also. How this can happen I do not know. Can infinite wretchedness proclaim unity with the divine life? And yet, Someone is drawing me, desiring to create in me this unity in truth. As long as the least of my actions is not God I am still false — I am not expressing the true meaning of my life.

For years I have felt it a duty to faithfully concentrate all my spiritual and physical powers in achieving what I thought to be the will of God in the situation which has been given me. But perhaps in doing this, too many things have been neglected.

'Now I believe that I can, indeed must, look at these things which surround me and demand all my attention.

'How often do I pass people without really seeing them! That is a lost opportunity to love in the present moment.

'I must become more and more aware of the low level to which I have decended. Perhaps it is not too late to learn.'

THE FINAL STAGES OF LEARNING TO LOVE

The years went by — difficult years for the active person she had been.

January 1, 1973

'I woke up this morning with a sense of emptiness, uselessness, I am now, (what a lot it costs to say this), an old convalescent lady, taking a long while to regain strength in weakened cells. I should like, at least, to give this life which you have given me, for love — passing it on to others. But how? If I have no more strength I cannot see the way. Must I merely survive? There must be something that I can still offer you, even though I feel that I am, and have, nothing. Do you only want my supreme act of freedom — offering you this love which you so freely give me? Lord, I love you!'

January 12, 1973

'This evening I feel lifted up and my life has a different color. There is so much evil, it is true, and there is death. But in no man, and in no thing does love cease to build. In the depth of every suffering, of every error there is a seed of light, perhaps exhausted, but awaiting its time of renewal.'

March 14, 1973

'It seems to me that never before have I been able to give so much; to work, to talk, to write. And yet my vital energy is slowly leaving me because the supreme gift to offer, is life; to leave myself with love, for love.'

September 15, 1973. Lanciano.

'Do not be afraid; you will endure the effort to the end because in you, with you, is the will, the hope, and the love of him who is Life.

'Maybe it was this that you asked for away back in your adolescence. Did you not ask to spend all of yourself, right to the very end? If you feel yourself being destroyed it means that the offering is being consumed, and the goal is drawing nearer.'

May 28, 1975

An entry which describes the last phase of her life: 'I am on a journey; the present moment is called hope, and tomorrow is the resurrection.'

May 1976

'Life and death are fighting in me, but there is a glimmer of another consciousness, another life. As a girl I prayed to die of love; now I know how difficult this is to achieve except by climbing the ladder of faith and hope. Lord, I believe, but help thou my faith!

'Never have I felt so strongly the futility of appearances. Real "being" is not this and I must try to prepare myself.'

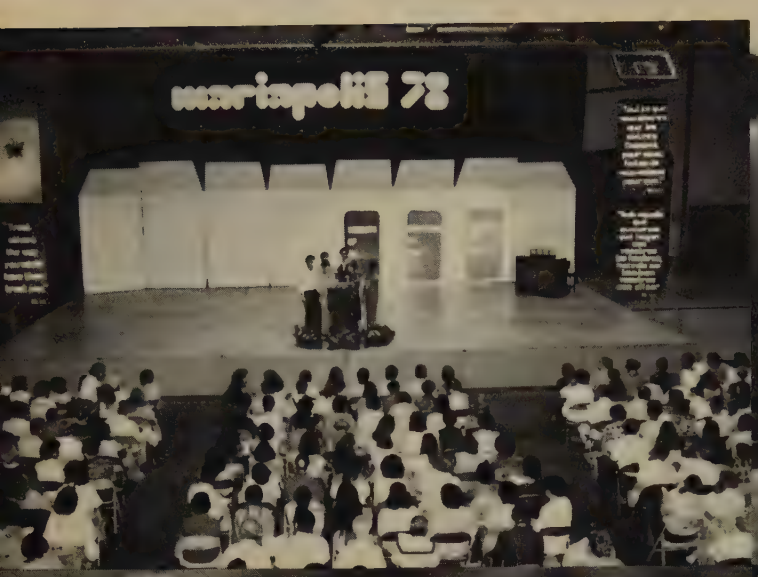
August 1976

'My occupations are small and useless; it is a weariness to search for them. Everything tires me — reading, writing about myself or others — and the turbulence of cares and thoughts seem poor and shabby. All that remains is to love, and to penetrate into the unfathomable mystery whose name is Jesus.'

On February 20, 1978, at 6 o'clock in the evening, mother died. On September 9, 1977 she had left us her children a spiritual testament: 'The fundamental principle is that of being united. Do not be afraid of losing, because when charity and love are among you, you will receive the hundred fold.'

Gemma Brasile

MARIAPOLIS '79



NORTHWEST

Place: St. Martin's College
Lacey, Washington

Date: July 22 - evening
through
July 28 - morning

EAST COAST

Place: Alfred University
Alfred, New York

Date: August 12 - evening
through
August 18 - morning

SOUTHWEST

You will be informed about the Southwest Mariapolis as soon as the date and the location are known.

by Piero Pasolini

ENERGY: A CRISIS OF OUR TIME

The anti-nuclear campaign, despite all its contradictions and divergent claims, may have another unexpected effect of pointing out the real problem.

Recently two European Electric companies (C.E.E. and E.N.E.L.) signed a contract with a consortium of European builders for the construction of an electric power plant in southern Italy, that would run on solar energy. This move could be seen as a beginning solution to certain energy problems; that is, the possibility of developing a technology for alternate sources of energy.

This solar electric plant will be an experimental prototype operating only at 1,000 Kw. This is enough to light up a street similar to the Appian Way of Rome at the cost of $9,000,000 — an exorbitant price if duplicated beyond the prototype.

The present energy crisis is not due to the scarcity of petroleum, but rather comes from the sudden increase of energy requirements in industries, in their neurotic chase for super profits. This is the situation which poses the problem of finding other more economic energy sources, or at least energy sources which are autonomous from the reigning powerful corporations.

A few years ago the increased awareness of the world energy crisis was exacerbated by predictions that world's oil deposits would be exhausted within our generation. However, it is now established that the underground deposits of combustibles could be sufficient at current world consumption for another 50 to 60 years. Moreover, there are huge coal deposits which alone could serve the world's energy needs for hundreds of years.

A more significant aspect in evaluating alternate energy sources may be the ecological one. All too few are aware of global pollution from toxic gases and carbons in the air and water. Since current world consumption of energy is about one trillion kilowatts per year, 90% from fossil combustibles, it is calculated that about two trillion tons of air pollutants enter the atmosphere each year. If this consumption pattern triples within the next fifty years, the earth's climate would change, beginning with a series of catastrophes. Thus, the energy crisis, ecologically considered, becomes even more serious than the problem of depleted resources. It is therefore incumbent upon us to solve the problem.

The alternate energy sources are commonly known. In order of importance they are: nuclear energy, hydroelectric energy, direct radiation from the sun, geothermic energy, wind energy, tidal energy, and variations of these.

For now, the only energy which can victoriously compete with petroleum is nuclear energy. The present electric plants could be substituted by nuclear plants within ten-fifteen years. Nuclear plants, like electric plants, cause pollution by emitting heat into water and air, but they do not emit dirty gases into the atmosphere. A further consideration regarding nuclear plants is the threat of radioactive pollution; not so much by the radiation emitted from these plants as by the various accidents which may occur, and above all by pollution which accumulates for thousands of years in the deposits of radioactive dumps.

In addition, there seem to be limited deposits of uranium which, at present consumption could last but a few decades. This inconvenience would be cleaned up in a decade by putting into action the so-called speedy nuclear reactor, autofertilizers or "breeders". In them, uranium 235 nuclei (which are present in enriched uranium by 2-3%) split, emitting neutrons which are not purposely slowed down. These fast moving neutrons transform the remaining uranium 238 (which is present in the amount of 97-98% and that in itself is inert), into plutonium, an element as fissionable as uranium 235. The result is the amount of plutonium produced which is greater than uranium consumed so that, in a very fast reactor, from a bar of enriched uranium, one can obtain 70-80 times more energy than from the same bar which has been put into a normal reactor of slow moving neutrons. Consequently, it follows that if a charge of uranium in a slow reactor lasts a year, the same charge in a breeder could last 70 years. Thus, even the dumps diminish proportionately.

At this point one must consider the danger that plutonium presents. Plutonium produced in a great quantity is an excellent nuclear explosive, as is ura-

nium 235. With the possession of a breeder, plutonium could also be purified to build atomic bombs. The technology involved would not be simple, yet it is much simpler than isolating uranium 235. This possibility provokes concern about the research being done in France, Germany and Italy to step up production of this type of a reactor. Yet, all of this presents itself as the most expedient alternate to energy produced from petroleum and coal; at least till the time when a nuclear reaction can be set off and controlled by heavy hydrogen fusion, on which are focused all hopes of a viable future energy source.

The other alternative which is thousands of years old is the utilization of waterfalls from rivers, starting with the first water mills. Today we are all familiar with the hydroelectric plants and their gigantic turbines and alternators. Someone may ask why this source of energy is not more developed. There are various reasons: one is that in the more industrialized zones the maximum monetary gain from waterfalls has been reached. Moreover, the construction of new basins is oftentimes very difficult, given the unpredictable climatic effects in mountainous regions, which would put many hydroelectric plants in great danger. Nevertheless, there still are many untapped hydro - energy reserves in less developed countries like Africa and Asia. At any rate, it has been estimated that hydroelectric energy cannot satisfy more than 10-15% of the world's needs.

At this point the eyes of everyone are focused on the sun, the source of heat which sends to earth in a mere hour as much energy as will be needed in the year 2000 in the course of a year. Indeed, all the energy that man, from antiquity up to now has used is solar energy. Wood, coal and petroleum are solar energy which has been stored by plants hundreds of millions of years ago. Water from the mountains that makes turbines rotate, wind that makes propellers turn and stirs the waves of the sea are solar energy which provokes atmospheric imbalance. Then there is also living energy; our muscles, organic reactions, cerebral activity — all this is sun, stored in complex vegetable and animal molecules on which we feed. Of all the energy used today, only nuclear energy is not from the sun.

Returning to our original point, by alternate energy we mean solar radiation captured directly by thermodynamic or electrical means. This makes things more complicated. Should we now suddenly be immersed in a general energy shortage, though still having the sun, we would end up as one shipwrecked who dies of thirst in the middle of the ocean. This is so because the quantity of solar calories is huge but at the same time they are diluted in the immense atmosphere, making it very difficult to concentrate them into restricted spaces in order to increase the temperature or to transform them into electricity.

Currently, this problem is being dealt with. The official news mentioned in the beginning could be interpreted as an indication that in various parts of the world the idea of making use of radiant sun energy is passing from the amateur phase to that of becoming a serious political issue on an industrial scale.

The various methods for capturing solar radiation for practical use are as follows: thermic panels placed on roof tops in order to heat water for radiators or baths in the home; photovoltage solar panels to transform the radiation directly into electricity (already in use in space satellites); the batteries of mirrors in order to obtain local temperatures of thousands of degrees.

In fact, this is the type of experimental plant that the CEE has decided to build in southern Italy. It comprises an area at least 3 acres large, covered by thousands of mirrors which could be programmed to follow the sun. These mirrors concentrate the solar rays on to an "absorber" placed on top of a tower 50 meters high, which in turn is connected to a steam boiler. The steam then flows through a turbine which activates an electric generator.

It is obvious that the plant will only work during periods of sunlight for 8-10 hours a day maximum — a total of 1,500 -2,000 hours a year. If we make a small calculation, we can see that in order to obtain 1,000 Kw. of power, it would require about 3 acres of land. Therefore, in order to build a plant which supplies 1,000 megawatts (1,000 times one million Kw., which is considered normal today), you would need a surface of 3,000 acres covered with mirrors ... quite a clutter! These types of plants would be expected to supply 20% of the energy needs of a nation like Italy. Should this plan be implemented, it would necessitate building over 100 of these plants covering a surface of about 300,000 acres.

This is something worth considering, but the problems are immense. A project of this type would seem more adaptable in desert zones, in spite of the fact that there isn't a great difference between the center of the Sahara desert and the almost always foggy plainlands around Milan, in terms of calories from the sun. The great difference instead lies in the value of the space to be used.

As stated before, there are other systems to capture solar radiation; the most promising is that of solar batteries which are being perfected to perform more economically and to resist at higher temperatures. In these batteries, radiation transforms itself directly into electric current. Another advantage is that they provide more of an economical arrangement in that they allow the parabolic mirrors to be set up in an irregular way, utilizing unused space such as the roof tops of a city.

As you can note, this is a recent development. If the outcome becomes serious politics, one can optimistically foresee that within 10 years or so, at least 10% of the western world's energy could be satisfied by means of large mirror power plants, large plants with new types of solar batteries and an extensive use of solar panels for heating homes.

Then there is another great source of substitute energy: the geothermic one. With all good will, if there would be an effort to advance this certain technology, this type of energy could really contribute with solar energy to satisfy a

Top photo: View of the spillway of the Kainji Dam on the Niger River, Northern Nigeria, as seen from the reservoir. It has been estimated that hydroelectric energy cannot satisfy more than 10-15% of the world's needs.
Lower photo: On the rooftop of a housing complex in Brooklyn a solar panel being used to utilize the rays of the sun for heating water. Devices such as this are appearing in many parts of the United States as people are looking for cheaper sources of energy.
Photos are courtesy of United Nations Photo Library.

a great chunk of energy needs. There has already been some experience done in this field. By adding up the potential of already existing and functioning power plants in the world, you total 1,000 megawatts, of which over one-third are produced in Italy.

There is also wind energy. In the past centuries, up to the appearance of the steam engine, practically the only powered machines other than water mills, were windmills. Even today the wind plays its part as a source of energy in various parts of the world. According to recent statistics, each year over 10,000 windmills are built and sold for local use in villages and farms; a small drop in the immense ocean of energy.

Other forms of energy also exist, like that of ocean waves, tides, swings of temperature between the surface and the bottom, and many others which practically cannot be utilized for lack of a system.

In conclusion, one can be made aware that a real energy problem per se does not exist. There is energy forever, for millions of years to come. There exists instead a political and moral problem. In a society where the interests of the single individual, and especially of single powerful groups, were subject to those of the collectivity, there would be no serious difficulty in developing a type of technology capable of utilizing one of the energy sources, the one most efficient and best for any situation. It has been noted that in the undertaking of the lunar project there were infinitely more difficulties than there were in the creating of solar or geothermic plants.

Here is a hypothetical example to illustrate the situation: If in place of nuclear energy, solar energy were to have been recognized as a power source by the military, we can be certain that over 50% of our human and economic potential would have been channeled in the direction of its development, and today we would have a very advanced technology for obtaining energy from the sun, in whatever quantity and for whatever use. The same could be said if solar energy represented a large and immediate source of profit for the various groups of financial power who dominate the world scene.

Humanity is still at this point: this, and not energy, is basically the real problem. ■

family life

The story of a rescue and a new beginning

The following is the story of a Brazilian family who experienced a total transformation in their way of living. It all happened through contact with other families who live — try to live — the mutual love of the Gospel.

by Hercilio De Farias Brito and Brian Skelding

Questions without answers

It was the end of the month. My pay packet was in my pocket. It should have been a time of great happiness for me ... but it wasn't. I was going home thoroughly fed up.

On paper my month's pay was $54 (1,300 Cruzieros). In fact it was much less, about $5. And Why? Because $11 had been deducted at source by creditors from whom I had obtained advances of something over $109. They were very exact and exacting in their calculations: minimum interest 10% and repayments by installments, signed for by me, to be paid monthly. But how could I keep a wife and a family of three small children on $20 a month, and pay the rent, school fees, the water rate, laundry as well as all the unexpected expenses?

And there were other debts also. I owed $250 to friends who fortunately didn't want any interest. Several hundreds for furniture and domestic appliances, etc. But the debt which hurt me the most of all was a little one, a mere $2 ... 40 Cruzieros ... which we owed to an already poverty stricken washerwoman. That just about completed the picture.

Nor was there any hope that those debts would get any smaller: on the contrary, they increased every month, since I very well knew that in order to live in the manner to which we had become accustomed I would have to beg for ever increasing favors from the money-lenders.

My distress was all but unbearable. I thought of what my relatives and friends must think of me. Even more intolerable, I thought of what my children would have to suffer, and in a situation for which they were in no way responsible. Already the whole financial mess had ruined my relationship with my wife. For ages we had ceased to understand each other; and already we were falling out over mere trifles.

High life and dead ends

To whom could I turn? I certainly never gave a thought to looking to God for help! For me God was a 'Far Away God', remote and untouchable. In the meantime all the avenues that I could explore were being progressively blocked to me. Any way, why should people trust me? I'd assiduously haunted all the bars in town! I had been forever going on spending sprees, hunting for the latest gadget for the home; the latest status symbol that our consumer society could think up; or for some expensive trinket which I hoped would please my wife. In fact I had been living in a fantasy world far beyond my means. I was living the life of a rich man when all the while I was head over heels in debt.

The question was ... where could I get the strength from to make the change?

That evening, with my wretched $20 in my pocket, I knew I had reached the limit.

Account O/D

I could't go on kidding myself any longer. I was discouraged and desperate. I even contemplated suicide! After all, if there was no solution what was the sense of living, I asked myself. Of course deep down I knew it was my own fault. I even knew the answer. I knew that I would have to program my life totally differently. Basically I really believed in in God. But in GOD and NOT in the Church. I had never had any time for religious institutions. I wouldn't even be married in a church, because I considered marriage to be no more and no less than a social contract. The civil rite was enough for that, so far as I was concerned. So useless did all christian practices seem to me that I refused to allow our children to be baptized. I had even tried to instill these ideas into my wife ...

Yes, even into my wife ... With her I had always taken a firm line: in the family I was The Authority. Not surprisingly, for this reason also things were not going too well!

And at work? ... There my preoccupation was to cut a good figure with my superiors at all costs!

In short ... my life hinged solely on ME' I was the most important person. I was the only one capable of solving any problem. I ... I ... I ...

And now my house of cards had collapsed miserably around me. I realized I had built it on nothing more than a lie: that I had deceived everyone, not simply my wife and my children but everyone: I had even deceived myself. Now had come the reckoning ...

When I got home to my wife I had to reveal everything. She, although she had gone the whole hog with me, had never conned herself into a false sense

Mariapolis Center, Recife, Brazil: One of several centers of formation in the spirituality of unity proper to the Focolare Movement. People who live there all base their lives on the Gospel.

of security: and she had not the least intention of throwing in the towel now that we faced ruin. She too started investigating every possible avenue of assistance. At first she too had no success Then, one day, everything changed. "Something very different from what we expected," was all she would tell me. To begin with she did not explain anything: but I noticed a change in her. She no longer started the usual rows; and a new serenity had come over her. And all the time she continued to go to see the new friends she had found.

Something different — something new

After a while I was invited to go there also. I remember the day well; it was sometime in January 1975.

In a small flat a group of young people were expecting me. Somehow or other I began to tell them everything. I spoke a lot; possibly too much. I told them about my debts and my problems. Without pausing for breath I poured out my story of desperation and failure. They didn't say anything. They just listened to me in silence. All of a sudden I felt free. This unburdening of myself had given me my first taste of freedom for a long time.

Eventually one of them murmured, "I bet you must be fed up to the back teeth with it all." For the first time I felt that somebody really understood me. They were quite obviously sharing it all with me, and there was no hint of judgement in them. It was just as if a ray of sunshine had penetrated the darkness in which I had been wandering.

Another meeting followed, and then another, and still another ... and then — a solution! They suggested that we should move into a little house that was made available to us about thirty kilometres out of town — Recife. The house was in a small community, like a village, where the people who lived there all based their way of life on an outlook quite different from anyone else I had ever met. The families who lived there were uncompromisingly dedicated — in the christian sense — to a common way of life. The village was next to a centre, or meeting place, which they told me was called 'The Mariapolis.' Even on the day fixed for us to go I was still wondering how on earth we were going to manage this move. I also had grave misgivings about what I thought would be the isolation we would feel, after being used to living in the Big City! I was flabberghasted, therefore, to arrive home to discover a lorry being loaded with everything we possessed! This certainly was a different way of looking at life! When they decided to do something, I thought, they certainly do it — and fast!

That very same night we were settled into our new home near the Mariapolis Centre. But my heart sank. "This is nothing but a desert!" I moaned to my wife, as soon as we were settled. "It's too far from everything. We shall be utterly miserable." Of course the truth was that I would have preferred to have been helped from a distance: to be allowed to stew in my own juice, so to speak, and not to have to face up to the people who knew my problems. I had, of course, expected them to treat me as deserving censure — which would have been just — and I was dreading that someone would say to me, "How on earth did you get into such a mess? How could you have been so irresponsible? What do you expect out of life? Are you thinking of carrying on in the same way as before? etc., etc." But they didn't. Instead, and to my amazement, I was received as a guest worthy of the greatest respect. Eventually, having invited us into the centre, someone took us into the Chapel; there they said to my wife, "TRUST ONLY IN HIM". They were pointing to the Tabernacle. "Remember, we are all creatures full of limitations, and all prone to make mistakes.

It was there and then that they put their proposals to me.

A different experience

"Here you can have a new experience of God. We ask that you give it a trial." That was what they said, but for me I still felt that God was very far off indeed; nevertheless my wife and I decided to try this 'experience.' (In a way I was challenging God to manifest himself.)

By and large circumstances dictated the program of our new life. I had to live there and to to work every day in the city, leaving home at 5 a.m. and returning again at 7 p.m. each evening. That took care of Monday to Friday!

At the same time we took our first about turn in the economic sector. We examined the family budget on the basis of my actual monthly 'cash-in-hand' income; as our new friends advised me. My criterion up until that moment had been the exact opposite — i.e. have what you need now (or rather what you want) — and afford it later.

It cost us a lot to apply this new system — and I don't mean financially. We had to give up so many things that we had always thought were essential to living: but now we had made the break we just had to keep going. By working out our daily expenses to the last penny, adding in the cost of travel to and from work, we were able to draw up an accurate table of our household expenses, each in its order of priorities. We started with what was essential for the welfare of the children, whom we agreed ought not to have to suffer many restrictions apart from luxuries. My wife and I had to endure much harder cuts. As you can well imagine, it was a question of undergoing a pretty rigorous discipline of self-denial. But this experience of deciding everything together, without anyone imposing it upon us, made the whole thing bearable: indeed, it brought to us a sense of serenity, because everything was seen in the light of the concepts which our friends had set before us, namely that life was only worth living when you are seeking not your own will, but the will of God, who, they assured us, loves us and knows us better than we know ourselves, or what is good for us. This was certainly logical: it was also true, they told us, so why not put it into practice?

The next step

The next step after our rigorous regime of controlled spending was to try to increase our income. My wife who, up until then, had only been involved with the house, and even then had had domestic help, found herself a job. She did it out of a sense of justice, so that our sacrifices in solving our problems should be equally shared. She began to do some sewing, just little things, which were sold during the Mariapolis meetings. As regards clothing, about which I had previously been very reckless, the problem solved itself, so to speak. When there was a real need then — because we all practiced the communion of goods, unostentatiously but quite freely, in the village — the need got met. The same thing happened over medicines and other necessities. It was as simple as that.

Then there came a truly unexpected source of income.

A visitor to the center, who met us and became interested in our story, when he went away left behind him a loan of $500 (10,000 Cruzieros), interest free, to pay off our debts to the money lenders.

Gradually we came to realize very clearly and in practical terms just how many unnecessary expenses we had incurred in the old days: record players, photograph albums, even the TV. So . . . everything that we could do without we sold; and what we made on the sale went to all the creditors. Our debts began to decrease. Our life began to be more orderly . . . and all thanks to our commitment to try, especially in the financial field, to work things out under the guiding eye of God, that is, to put christianity into practice first and foremost in our own family life.

Things improved at work also. I got a raise in my job as a public employee; and then a bonus. This made it possible to reduce still more of our commitments. Then one day, during an office party, I was lucky enough to win a return air ticket to San Salvador, in a raffle. I sold it, and this too went to pay off old debts. Not long after that there was another share out of the profits, and this time I was able to clear all my debts, including the $500 which "Providence" had sent us.

A new beginning

Now that there were no more debts we could begin to get around us a few things which, although regarded as luxuries, are really necessities . . . for example, a fridge! But the most important thing of all was something quite different. Our life was not only becoming ordered from the financial point of view, it was also finding a new center of balance, most especially on the spiritual and psychological plane. The tiffs between me and my wife had disappeared altogether, and their place had been taken by a dialogue based on living together without pretense, in unity, thus ensuring peace at the very heart of our home. The era of monologues had gone forever also. The era of the husband and the father being the only one to have an opinion — vanished. Everything, but everything, was now discussed together, and whenever possible, with the active participation of our eldest son.

The new commandment

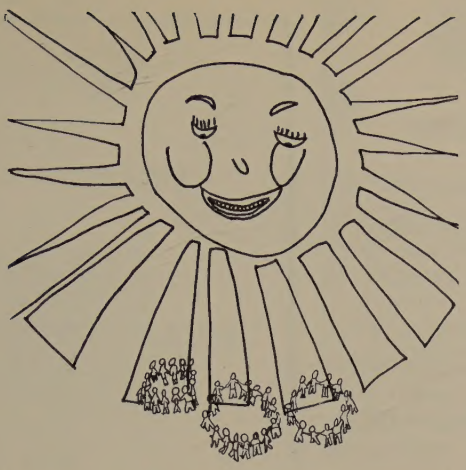
. . . Little by little we were in fact establishing a suitable climate in which to begin deliberately trying to live our lives based on the Ideal which our new friends had suggested to us . . . that life centered on the 'New Commandment' of loving each other as Christ loves us. Above all we felt that our family life should now be built upon the sacrament of marriage. After a period of the most intense preparation we were married with a full religious ceremony in the Mariapolis Center, surrounded by the warmth and affection of the whole community; and . . . on the same day and at the same time . . . our children were baptized.

Something else happened too. As we delved into the marvellous new experience we discovered that we were losing our contact and solidarity with our former friends, those with whom we had spent so much time. I who, in the days of my folly, had been the toast of the 'Men-about Town', for my gourmandising; began now to be despised by them: now that I had begun to live honestly and sensibly. But things did not entirely stay that way.

At a later stage, those same people, when they struck difficult times, began to look us up again to ask our advice. Even when our advice was ignored, I still tried very hard to stand by my former friends; even those who were thoroughly offensive towards us, simply because my own experiences in the past helped me to understand their situation. It is only now that I can truly see what a terrifying emptiness there is in that 'half-life' in which I was previously entangled.

Now the 'cure' is complete. We are returning to the city where we shall live as a family with an entirely new outlook, trying to show in our daily lives that christianity really is the answer for the life of our families today — families in crisis — families whose very survival is at risk! ■

THE VERY YOUNG AND THE GOSPEL



Bernadette shared with us some of her experiences at school and at home—they reflect her desire to put the gospel into her daily life.

Monday

In sewing class I was cutting my pattern pieces when I noticed that some of them were missing. I looked everywhere but couldn't find them. I was about to lose my temper, because if I didn't find them, then I wouldn't be able to finish my pants but the voice of Jesus inside of me stopped me from getting mad. This was a big suffering because I worked so hard on the pants but I knew I had to love this suffering. I asked the teacher if she knew where they were. She said she had them because she found them on one of the tables in the class. I was really happy that I didn't stop loving.

Tuesday

In cooking class we were making a pie and this girl was doing everything and she wouldn't let anyone else do some of the work. I wanted to help but the girl was doing everything. After the pie was baked we were going to cut it into pieces. I was about to cut when that same girl came up to me and took the knife out of my hand. I was about to grab it off her and wanted to get mad at her and tell her that she wouldn't let anyone help. I remembered that the will of God was to love her and not think of how I felt. I tried to love her with all of my heart and I was happy.

Wednesday

Usually during the last class of the day I get tired. One day I thought I could take it easy in the class and rest and not listen to the teacher. Immediately I remembered that in the teacher there was Jesus to be loved. He was talking to me. I had to forget my tiredness and listen to the teacher. I tried to listen to him as though I were listening to Jesus. I was happy that I didn't let that chance of loving go by.

Thursday

In one of my classes some girls were making fun of me about something. It was a big suffering for me because they were teasing me and I didn't like it. I felt like answering back, but I remembered how Jesus was made fun of and he suffered a lot so I decided that I wanted to be like him.

Friday

Our sewing teacher told us that we had to finish our project by this Friday and we should come in at lunch time and after school for extra help. The teacher canceled most of our extra sewing classes and I was about to get mad at her because I wanted to finish my pants this week. I remembered that if Jesus were the sewing teacher I wouldn't get mad at him. I didn't get mad at her and I was happy because I didn't give into the "old man." (1)

Monday

On Monday my mother and I decided to go to the shoe store to buy a pair of boots for myself. After school I would go to the shoe store and meet my mother there. When I went there I waited for my mother and I was getting kind of tired of waiting for her so I decided to pick out the boots I wanted and when she would come she would just have to pay. I waited for about half an hour. I worried about if she was coming or not so I phoned home and my mother told me that she was sorry and she couldn't make it. I was about to get mad at her and tell her that I waited at the shoe store for nothing. But I remembered that the will of God was to say it was alright and maybe we could come another time. I didn't get mad and she told me to put the storekeeper on the line. She talked to him and she asked him if I could bring the boots home and pay for them the next day. He said it was okay. I was really happy because I was able to bring the boots home but most of all because I didn't lose that chance of loving Jesus in my mother.

Tuesday

Tuesday after school I came home and before I could take my coat off my mother asked me if I could go to my brother's school and see if he was there. I wanted to tell my mother that I was tired and that I didn't want to go, but something inside of me was telling me, "Go and do what your mother wants you to do. Then without any hesitation I said, "Okay I'll go." I was really happy because I listened to the voice of Jesus in me and because my mother was happy.

Wednesday

In cooking class we were cleaning the table and washing and drying the dishes. I was using the dish cloth and my friend in my group wanted to use it. I was about to tell her to wait until I was finished and then I would give it to her. I remembered the will of God was to love in the present. I gave it to her and she was happy and I was happy too. ●

(1) Colossians 3,9

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